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# Situating Asian American Environmental (In)Justices through Radical History Walking Tours

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In partial fulfillment of a Bachelor of Arts Degree in Environmental Analysis,  
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## **ABSTRACT**

By analyzing two radical history walking tours in Seattle, WA, and Berkeley, CA, this thesis aims to examine how Asian American communities can find their places in the U.S. environmental movement. I argue that these walking tours provide generative pedagogical tools to engage the general public to unpack the complex Asian American history embedded within urban spaces. I also articulate how these walking tours have the capacity to situate environmental struggles and activism within urban spaces, illustrating that various Asian American social and political activism has always been addressing environmental concerns. Furthermore, I argue that these walking tours of Asian American cultural landscapes enable us to recognize the long history of cross-ethnic organizing in Asian American activist movements. Lastly, I advocate for an Asian American environmental movement that incorporates a decolonial/indigenous framework, which could allow all marginalized communities to envision more just practices of spatial organizing and land use in the future.

**Keywords: Radical History, Walking Tour, Environmental Justice, Asian American, Critical Pedagogy**

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## INTRODUCTION

This thesis project is originally inspired by an audio-guided radical walking tour I went on this past summer in Seattle with the Doris Duke Conservation Program at the University of Washington. Nancy Woo, a staff member and one of my mentors for my program, organized discussions on the role of capitalism in today's global environmental crisis followed by a walking tour that she put together for the Central District, a neighborhood in which she was residing. For the duration of 90 minutes, Nancy's audio tour took us to see the uneven development as a result of the ongoing gentrification, the various public artworks on the streets, histories of activism in the Central District, as well as the efforts of environmental conservation in that neighborhood through the forms of community garden, street-side plants, etc. In comparison to a superfluous tour, it was powerful to learn about the deep history of a neighborhood through the mode of walking and listening to the narration of a local resident and activist.

During the same summer, I was in the middle of my internship at InterIm Community Development Association, a non-profit working for housing equity in the International District (ID) neighborhood, as part of my program. My focus was with the Danny Woo Community Garden -- a space created through the activism against gentrification in the 1970s in the ID for low-income elders of Asian descent to practice their traditions of growing food and cultivating land. My main responsibility was to assist with all the educational programs and to co-design an educational curriculum based in the garden for InterIm's youth program for inner-city high school students. Because of my internship, I was able to meet many community members and to learn so much about the various people and events that make the ID the way it is today. I was also thinking a lot with my fellow intern and friend, Artis Trice, about how to incorporate these histories of community members fighting for their rights to stay in a neighborhood that they can call home.

We eventually modeled several sessions in our curriculum after the walking tour that we went on in the Central District, asking our students to identify plants and cultural symbols that they recognize but also leading them to learn about the stories hidden in both the cultural and natural landscapes in the ID.

During my time working at the ID neighborhood, I also came across a tour guide titled *A Radical History of Seattle's International District: A Walking Tour*, put together by an anonymous author and published by *Left Bank Books*, a small leftist and anarchist bookstore right by the famous Pike's Place Market. Even though I did not get the chance to walk through the ID using that tour guide over the summer, I was immediately intrigued by the framework of radical walking tours. I thought back to a rather unpleasant encounter in a class of which I was briefly part. When discussing the idea of authenticity within the tourism industry, the professor brought up the reconstruction of the San Francisco Chinatown as a way to revitalize the neighborhood's businesses. When I tried to engage the class critically by asking if a traditional tour would give the visitors an authentic experience of the daily lives in SF Chinatown, especially considering the shifts that it has endured over the years, no one seemed to understand what I was trying to get across. I was even told by the professor that I should scale back, in terms of how deep my questions should go during future class discussions. While, unfortunately, I did not get the chance to further engage with that topic as I dropped the class after that session, I have been thinking about the ways that we could engage the general public in more radical discussions about the histories of these "tourist attractions."

Therefore, when I learned about the tour guidebook of Seattle's International District, I began to think about how radical history walking tours could shift the ways that people, especially tourists and outsiders, experience urban landscapes. The designation of ethnic enclaves as tourist



attractions is often an extension of the colonial gaze, which permits tourists to view these cultures as exotic objects on exhibition, thus asserting codes of dominance and subjugation and creating uneven power relations. Marketing ethnic enclaves as tourist attraction also allows the tourists to avoid engaging with the oppressive construction and transformation of these spaces that they themselves might be actively engaging in. Like other ethnic enclaves, Chinatowns across the U.S. are imagined “as places of poverty and deprivation, poor housing stock, overcrowding, disadvantage.” Even renovated as tourist attractions, they are still seen under a similar scope that deems them as different from the mainstream U.S. urban landscape.<sup>1</sup> Yet, I see the model of radical history walking tour as an intervention to exploitative tourist consumption and as a tool to engage people to envision more radical changes to the urban landscape.

As an Environmental Justice scholar and a student from China living in the Asian diaspora in the United States, I am also using the project as an opportunity to expand my own understanding of my positionality in the Environmental Justice movement and my relationship with the Asian diaspora in this country. While it is important for us to critique the mainstream environmental movement as one that is white-dominant, we also have to actively offer parallel models of environmentalism that center various communities of color. In the goal of this specific project, I am especially interested in how we could highlight the roles that Asian American communities have taken in the environmental movement.

This thesis project aims to evaluate how radical history walking tours could help us better understand Asian American environmental struggles and activism. Through analyzing two established radical history walking tours in Seattle, WA and Berkeley, CA, I argue that these walking tours provide generative pedagogical tools to engage the general public to unpack the

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<sup>1</sup> Pnina Werbner, "Metaphors of Spatiality and Networks in the Plural City: A Critique of the Ethnic Enclave Economy Debate," *Sociology* 35, no. 3 (August 2001): 672.

complex Asian American history embedded within urban spaces. I will articulate how these walking tours could help us situate environmental activism within urban spaces, illustrating that various Asian American social and political activism have also always been addressing environmental concerns. Furthermore, I argue that these walking tours of Asian American cultural landscapes enable more robust examination of the relationships between Asian American spaces and those of other communities. More specifically, these walking tours highlight that many communities of color and working-class communities have suffered from the uneven spatial organizing in the U.S., and Asian American activists have achieved great success through building solidarity and coalition with other communities.

Since this project takes a deep interest in how Asian American communities have interacted with the land and environment through history, it is important to recognize that the uneven spatial organizing that has been oppressing many communities in the U.S. first started with the theft of indigenous land. In other words, settler colonialism has made major contributions to the ongoing environmental injustices. Therefore, in this project, I also offer some discussions on the peculiar positions that Asian Americans have occupied in this settler colonial nation and advocate for incorporating decolonial thoughts into the Asian American environmental movement.

In the rest of this introductory chapter, I will discuss some of the theoretical foundations for this thesis project. First, I will examine how the relationship between race, space and scale is critical to the U.S. environmental justice movement. In particular, I aim to articulate the nuances that Asian American migrant histories add to the relationship between race, space and scale. Then I will discuss how walking enables more radical environmental education. Finally, I will explain my methods and provide an outline of the chapters.

## Race, Space, Scale, and Environmental Justice

Over time, scholars have shifted their perspectives on spatial dimensions of ethnic-specific communities as *foregrounding* rather than *background*.<sup>2</sup> This line of thinking asks us to recognize that spaces are not just mere backgrounds on which social and political activities take place but rather that they play critical roles in various social processes facilitated by different parties. As a result, spatial theories provide many tools to the studies of racial formation in the U.S.

In their introduction to a special issue of *Occasion*, titled “Race, Space, Scale”, Wendy Cheng and Rashad Shabazz provide a thorough overview of “the United States’ terrorization of race,” or in other words, “the practice of race through spatial differences.”<sup>3</sup> They point out that European settlers first started such practices through conquest and economic exploitation of the Americas.<sup>4</sup> These series of politically charged events, such as the genocide of Native Americans and transatlantic slavery from Africa, have both erased the Indigenous people from the American landscape and tied Black people to a plantation economy and its after effects through enslavement. Other state-sponsored policies and laws, including Jim Crow laws, and anti-immigration policies, continued to deem Black and Brown people “out of place,” or threatening to the status quo. Therefore, spatial theories are instrumental to the understanding of racial formation in the U.S.

Scale is also important when evaluating how racist practices are reinforced through spatial differences. When discussing the spatial dimension of Jim Crow laws, Cheng and Shabazz point out that Jim Crow racism works across various interlocking scales.<sup>5</sup> On the scale of body, Jim

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<sup>2</sup> Kyeyoung Park and Russell C. Leong, "How Do Asian Americans Create Places? From Background to Foreground," *Amerasia Journal* 34, no. 3 (2008): vii.

<sup>3</sup> Wendy Cheng and Rashad Shabazz, "Introduction: Race, Space, and Scale in the Twenty-First Century," *Occasion* 8 (August 31, 2015).

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*, 2.

<sup>5</sup> *Ibid.*, 3.

Crow laws separated black and white bodies apart in all spaces. On the larger scales, these laws were also able to claim certain spaces as better and thus suitable for whites and vice versa.

In this project, I critically examine the relationships among race, space, and scale as the methodology of *Environmental Justice*, a concept that first emerged in the 1980s in the U.S. to confront the fact that people of color are more likely to be exposed to toxins in their residential areas. In his analysis of the Black Lives Movement, David Pellow makes the critical call for us to consider the connection between race, space, and scale under the current global environmental crisis. Pellow states, “if one only pays attention to the global scale it appears that the worst effects of climate change are not yet upon us. But if one examines what is occurring in neighborhoods, *barrios*, indigenous peoples' lands, and much of the global south, the picture is quite different.”<sup>6</sup> Thus, scalar analysis has the capacity to help us understand who have been impacted the worst by the ongoing environmental crisis around the world.

Scalar thoughts could also help confront the normative understanding of the environment. The environment, in the mainstream white environmentalist movement, has often been seen as a “natural” one -- unpopulated by humans, such as mountains, forests, rivers, etc. Thus, issues that are portrayed as environmental are oil spills in the ocean, the lone polar bear on a melting iceberg, forests burning, etc. While I am not arguing that these issues are not important, I want to demonstrate the singularity within the mainstream representation of environmental issues, and the notion of the environment at large. A scalar analysis of the components that make up these natural environments illustrates that they are not separated from the day-to-day human built environment as they share common elements like air, water, and sunlight. In other words, scalar thoughts could help break down the barriers between the natural and urban environments, expanding the notion

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<sup>6</sup> David N. Pellow, *What Is Critical Environmental Justice?* (Cambridge, UK: Polity Press, 2018), 49.

of environmentalism. A consideration of race, space, and scale, thus, allows us to view many of our built environments as also sites of environmental struggles and racial injustices. In this project, I specifically turn to the urban environments as sites of environmental struggles for various Asian American communities.

### **The Pedagogy of Radical History Walking Tours**

In this section, I will discuss the specific issues that walking tours are able to evoke and their capacity to engage the general public in such issues. When I first started the project, I was focusing on the phenomenon of gentrification in Asian American neighborhoods. I came across the concept of *walkability* under the context of “Walk Score,” which started as a website that scores the “walkability” of any address in the United States on a scale from 0 to 100 based on the existing walking routes to nearby amenities. There has been much discussion over the value of walkability and the inaccuracies of “Walk Score.”<sup>7</sup> Nevertheless, the fact that real estate agencies are using these metrics to assess property values suggests that walking itself is linked the material value, and thus privilege, of different neighborhoods. Since the material value of a neighborhood often determines its environmental conditions, like its proximity to polluting sources, walking is tied to environmental privilege as well.

More specifically, “Walk Score” indicates the number of nearby amenities and the condition of the walking paths, both dependent on the socio-economic status of the particular neighborhood. Furthermore, the mentioning of nearby parks in a “Walk Score” report suggests that the existence of green space is also considered during the evaluation of a neighborhood. However, the existence green space is related to the class status and subsequently the racial makeup

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<sup>7</sup> Robert Steuteville, “The value of walkability and Walk Score inaccuracies,” *Public Square: A CNU Journal*, September 19, 2016.

of any U.S. neighborhood. Thus, walking as a method of inquiry and pedagogy calls our attention to the racialization of various urban environments.<sup>8</sup> The case of “Walk Score” also illustrates that the desire to accumulate and control economic capitals has facilitated the uneven and racialized spatial organizing in the U.S.

In contrast, walking tours also evoke a method of inquiry and pedagogy that allows a fully embodied experience for their participants. Both of the walking tours analyzed in this thesis are supposedly wheelchair accessible, which helped me to think about walking tours through the concept of *embodiment*. Rooted in disability studies, *embodiment* is “a way of thinking about bodily experience” that “includes pleasures, pain, suffering, sensorial and sensual engagements with the world, vulnerabilities, capabilities, and constraints as they arise within specific times and places.”<sup>9</sup> Thinking of the experience of participating in walking tours through *embodiment* helps us pay attention to the bodily and emotional responses to deteriorated buildings, the view and smell of green spaces, the noise of the public streets, and more during walking tours. In this way, an embodied experience through walking tours also asks the participants to pay closer attention to the details that they might not otherwise notice if traveling in cars, on buses or even on bicycles.<sup>10</sup> Moreover, the embodied experiences of walking through urban spaces poses an intervention to the normative methods of education, which privileges selected senses and confines human bodies in enclosed spaces.

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<sup>8</sup> Omi and Winant uses “the term *racialization* to signify the extension of racial meaning to a previously racially unclassified relationship, social practice or group.” In the context of this thesis, I use the term to highlight the organizations of urban environments are often tied to the racial makeups of the neighborhoods; Michael Omi and Howard Winant, *Racial Formation in the United States: From the 1960s to the 1980s* (New York: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1986), 14.

<sup>9</sup> Abby Wilkerson, “Embodiment,” in *Keywords for Disability Studies*, by Rachel Adams, Benjamin Reiss, and David Serlin (New York: New York University Press, 2015), 67.

<sup>10</sup> Jennie Middleton, “Sense and the city: exploring the embodied geographies of urban walking,” *Social & Cultural Geography* 11, no. 6 (September 2010): 582.

It is also important to note how a guided (whether through a guidebook or with actual tour guides) walking tour helps us understand the histories embedded within different built urban environments. As noted earlier, the histories of the changes that built urban environments experience have usually been driven by economic forces. Thus, I turn to Marxist analyses to articulate how these radical history walking tours are able to help us understand the social changes within their focused neighborhoods through the lens of political economy. In other words, I believe that these tours, to some extent, have illustrated the interactions between material wealth, political power, and labor relations as precursors to the environmental injustices in their neighborhoods. In his 1989 book *The Condition of Postmodernity: An Enquiry into the Origins of Cultural Change*, David Harvey states that “historical-geographical materialism is an open-ended and dialectical mode of enquiry rather than a closed and fixed body of understandings.”<sup>11</sup> Similarly, by revealing both the spatial and temporal elements of the struggles and resistance in particular neighborhoods, guided radical history walking tours are able to allow their participants to take “an open-ended dialectical mode of enquiry” to the forces that have shifted these urban spaces. In the case of the tour in Berkeley, because it is guided by its two curators, the tour has evolved from its original version as the curators incorporate new stories, such as the city-wide organizing against hate towards immigrants after the election of Donald Trump in 2016.

Scholars have also paid attention to how walking has been related to temporality through human history. In the ancient Roman world, walking was often associated with upper-class status as it was common for elite Roman villas to have features to allow one to walk with their friends.<sup>12</sup> In this tradition, walking is tied to leisure time, a temporality that is only accessible to those can

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<sup>11</sup> David Harvey, *The Condition of Postmodernity: Enquiry into the Origins of Cultural Change* (Cambridge, Mass: Blackwell, 1990), 355.

<sup>12</sup> Timothy M. O'Sullivan, *Walking in Roman Culture* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011), 6.

afford it. This tradition continues for centuries, evident in the amount of literature and artifacts that depict the romanticized walks through various spaces. However, walking is also commonly employed as a metaphor for overcoming challenges and enabling a progress narrative.<sup>13</sup> Capitalism, a system that has enabled much of the unjust processes and histories discussed in this thesis, relies heavily on progressive time. The progress narrative, which is influential in the development of modernity, is inherently built upon the ongoing settler colonialism and transatlantic slavery.<sup>14</sup> Critiques on the progressive time, which renders Black and Indigenous bodies as out of time, are also relevant to environmental justice because it continues to deny the access to healthy living conditions for certain populations. At the global level, modernity, largely shaped by the progress narrative, is built upon the continuous exploitation of natural resources and labor of indigenous communities around world.

Yet, when used as a method to teach radical history, walking has the capacity to disrupt the linear chronological temporality by revealing how specific communities have been continuously excluded from the progress narrative. As discussed in more details in Chapter 2, these walking tours allow the participants to have a transtemporal experience of these hidden histories, thus inviting them to embrace the legacies of past activists. A transtemporal analysis can also be instrumental to the environmental justice movement. For example, environmental justice scholars have critiqued the model of National Parks as the face of the U.S. environmental movement. A transtemporal analysis of National Parks reveals that these parks are established upon both the dispossession of land for Indigenous people and the exploitation of foreign labor. Therefore,

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<sup>13</sup> Stephanie Springgay and Sarah E. Truman, "Counterfuturisms and speculative temporalities: walking research-creation in school," *International Journal of Qualitative Studies in Education* 32, no. 6 (2019): 556.

<sup>14</sup> Ibid., 547.



transtemporal thinking allows us to take these histories into account when we evaluate the contemporary policies on wilderness preservation and national park establishments.

In addition, historian Martha Norkunas has written extensively on the topic of tourism and history. In her 1993 book *The Politics of Public Memory* centered around her research in Monterey, California, Norkunas tries “to articulate how one community has used public history and tourism to communicate specific ideas about power relationships.”<sup>15</sup> I argue that both of the radical history walking tours analyzed in my thesis have similar goals: how to publicize hidden radical history to engage the general public to unpack power relationships embedded within urban landscapes. In other words, these tours aim to unsettle the normative public perceptions of these urban spaces as a way to call for social changes. These tours also have the capacity to challenge the often-exploitative tourist industry as they ask the participants to situate themselves in relations

In conclusion, walking tours can be generative pedagogical tools for us to actively engage with the hidden histories of specific urban spaces through embodiment, pushing us to consider the social, cultural, economic, and environmental consequences of particular choices of urban planning and spatial organization.

## Methodology

In this thesis project, I use *close textual analysis* as my main methodology of inquiry. Rooted in literary analysis, *close textual analysis* asks us to examine pieces of literature through a focused consideration of an author’s choice of words and images. With these two walking tours as objects of my analysis, I pay special attention to the ways that the tour is organized spatially, the

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<sup>15</sup> Martha K. Norkunas, *The Politics of Public Memory: Tourism, History, and Ethnicity in Monterey, California* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1993), 10.

kinds of visual aids the tour provides, and the specific narrative choices (sometimes theatrical in the case of the Berkeley tour) these two tours take. In addition, with both additional sources provided in both tours and my own research, I pay close attention to the various elements within the urban built environment, such as green spaces on the street, decorative elements of various buildings, etc. I also use an informal approach of *participant observation* to both tours, and my analysis of the tours rely on my personal experiences as a participant. The methods of close reading and participant observation allow me to assess the effectiveness of these walking tours as pedagogy.

I also want to acknowledge my positionality as an outsider to the communities, about which I am writing. In the case of Seattle, even though I had the privilege to spend eight weeks working with a community-based organization among various community members, I was not living the day-to-day struggles that happened historically and continue to occur as many of the people who actually live there for most of their lives. While the positionality of an outsider grants me unique perspectives, especially since these walking tours are meant to educate people who are not familiar with these histories, I recognize that many stories told through both tours have had real material consequences on many people. For example, the existence of the two freeways next to Seattle's International District continue to create air pollution, which negatively affects the respiratory health of its residents. The Berkeley Tour also highlights the story of Kartar Singh Sarabha who sacrificed his own life at the age of nineteen for India's liberation from the British colonial regime. It is with the weight of the death or impaired health conditions of many community activists that I am writing this thesis, with the hope that their actions would eventually lead to more just futures.

## Chapter Overview

In Chapter 1, I examine a guidebook titled *A Radical History of Seattle's International District: A Walking Tour*, written by an anonymous author and published by Left Banks Books in 2015. I pay particular attention to the ways that the guidebook highlights the different actions between the state government and community members and organizations on the preservation of historical sites as a way to commemorate Asian American struggles and activism. I also point out that the guidebook demonstrates how the (trans)formation of a pan-Asian neighborhood in Seattle has been closely related to that of other surrounding neighborhoods.

In Chapter 2, I examine the *Berkeley South Asian Radical History Walking Tour* curated and delivered by Barnali Ghosh and Anirvan Chatterjee. I focus on the storytelling choices that Ghosh and Chatterjee make to evoke transnational and transtemporal analyses of South Asian activism based in the city of Berkeley. Relying on the work of environmental justice scholars, I also aim to shed light on the various environmental aspects of these South Asian activist stories in Berkeley, with the goal to expand the notion of environmental activism, especially for Asian Americans.

## CHAPTER ONE: WALKING FIGHTS AGAINST GENTRIFICATION IN SEATTLE'S CHINATOWN-INTERNATIONAL DISTRICT AND BEYOND

Summer 2019, as I walked down South Main Street in Seattle's Chinatown-International District (C-ID), also known just as the International District (ID), to catch the 74 bus after work



*Figure 1: the Construction of the Koda Condominium Flats in Seattle's International District*

every day, I could not help but notice the ongoing construction of the Koda Condominium Flats (figure 1) across the street from my bus stop. The orange construction barricades, the metal fences, the green shipping containers along with the blue and white cranes all signal the emergence of a modern building project in the midst of a historic Asian American neighborhood. More importantly, the 17-story building itself might not resemble anything g like the rest of the C-ID but, rather the homogenous skyscrapers in downtown Seattle less than a mile northwest of the neighborhood. Is this the future of this neighborhood? How would

the low-income residents manage to stay in the place that they called home for years? How would the future generations remember the histories of their ancestors fighting tirelessly for the survival of this neighborhood? I asked myself these questions, contemplating the complicated relationship between urban development and the preservation of culture and history.

The International District neighborhood in Seattle has been a site for many multi-ethnic Asian American struggles and resistance. Ever since the 1960s, many community activists have

been fighting against gentrification and for housing equity due to various government-directed public infrastructure construction projects. There are still many non-profit organizations, mostly born out of activist movements through history, that are fighting for social and environmental justice today. These non-profits, along with local businesses and residents, have played essential roles in preserving the history of oppression and activism in the neighborhood not only through paper documentation but also through public art projects, which are attempts to preserve cultural elements within the physical landscapes.

In this chapter, I will examine the tour guidebook titled *A Radical History of Seattle's International District: A Walking Tour*, written by anonymous author(s) and published by Left Banks Books in 2015.<sup>16</sup> Drawing from my personal experience walking the tour and the additional resources that the tour guide provides, I argue that this Guidebook successfully highlights that the physical and cultural landscapes of the Seattle's International District, which contains much of the history of gentrification and the activist movements against it, has not been preserved by the government but rather by efforts of community members and local business and non-profit organizations. Throughout my analysis, by referring to *The Principles of Environmental Justice (EJ)*, I will also highlight the environmental stakes in the various events that have shaped the landscapes of the ID, demonstrating that many Asian American social and political activism has always been inherently environmental.<sup>17</sup> Furthermore, this Guidebook sheds light, both explicitly and implicitly, on the interconnectedness between today's ID and its surrounding neighborhood, offering us a more comprehensive understanding of the urban space of Seattle's ID. Lastly, as the Guidebook illustrates that much of the Asian American activism in Seattle's International District

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<sup>16</sup> I will use the word *Guidebook* instead of its full title for concision through this chapter.

<sup>17</sup> Delegates to the First National People of Color Environmental Leadership Summit, *The Principles of Environmental Justice (EJ)* (Washington, D.C., 1991).

has been organized around the access to land and space through the forms of housing, business venues, green spaces, etc., I also turn to *storied land*, a framework rooted in Indigenous Studies, to envision a more radical stance on the Asian American fight for environmental justice.

The questions that I will explore in this chapter include: how does taking the walking tour with this Guidebook allow us to understand the (trans)formation of the ID? How does the Guidebook highlight the interconnectedness between the ID and its surrounding neighborhood? How does the Guidebook help us to envision a more just urban space for Asian Americans?

In this chapter, I will first provide an overview of the formation and gentrification, two intricately connected processes, of the so-called ethnic enclaves. Then I offer a detailed analysis of *A Radical History of Seattle's International District: A Walking Tour*, articulating the environmental impacts embedded in the stories told. Lastly, I will articulate how the decolonial framework of *storied land* provides a point of departure that permits a much more radical vision of the role of Asian Americans in the environmental justice movement.

### **The Formation and Gentrification of Ethnic Enclaves**

Many Asian American communities across the entire United States are facing similar changes in their neighborhoods where a new wave of real estate development is drastically changing the demographic makeup and the physical appearance of the neighborhoods. While many of these development projects brand themselves as positive measures to develop and revitalize these neighborhoods, many residents experience the struggles of displacement, and thus, many activists have identified these processes as gentrification.

Neil Smith explains that gentrification is essentially a process of capital accumulation through the form of investment in the built environment.<sup>18</sup> He claims that the material impacts of such a process of capital movements turns it into a movement of people in and out of the cities; with middle- and upper-class people moving into the city while lower-class people inherit the declining suburbs. Because of the link between socio-economic class and race in the U.S., the neighborhoods that experienced the most impact of gentrification are usually those with high concentration of residents of color or low-income residents.

Analyzing gentrification experienced by Asian American communities, and other communities of color and low-income communities asks us to critically engage with the histories of the formation of these neighborhoods in the first place. The formation of urban ethnic enclaves was not often not the choice of those who ended up residing in those spaces but the rather the choice of those with power who also actively tried to maintain the hierarchical class structure. As mentioned in the introduction, it is important to recognize that the formation of these ethnic enclaves have often been results of racist housing policies and anti-immigration laws. Furthermore, while the workforce that built and maintained most of the infrastructure, regardless whether it's within these enclaves or not, for this country have been composed of mostly immigrant working-class residents of the cities, it is unjust that they are the same people who have been living in segregated neighborhoods that are deemed as filthy and worthless, and have been forced to relocate frequently.

I turn to George Lipsitz's 2007 article "The Racialization of Space and the Spatialization of Race: Theorizing the Hidden Architecture of Landscape" to further interrogate the formation

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<sup>18</sup> Neil Smith, "New Globalism, New Urbanism: Gentrification as Global Urban Strategy," *Antipode* 34, no. 3 (July 2002), Wiley Online Library.

and gentrification of these ethnic enclaves.<sup>19</sup> Lipsitz argues that there is a national spatial imaginary of whiteness, or the ideal of the pure American space, that has functioned to skew “opportunities and life chances in the U.S.”<sup>20</sup> Such an imaginary centers around “the contemporary ideal of the properly-ordered, prosperous private home” through exclusion and homogenization via racially segregated housing policies.<sup>21</sup> On the one hand, this national spatial imaginary has helped create ethnic enclaves as it cannot exist with the presence of spaces, occupied by non-white communities, that are deemed as less worthy. On the other hand, this national spatial imaginary persists and continues to grow, resulting in its invasion into these unworthy spaces through gentrification.

Yet, Lipsitz argues for a different spatial imaginary that many non-white communities hold, one that “revolves around solidarities within, between, and across spaces” and values “the public good over private interest.”<sup>22</sup> Similarly, Michael Liu and Kim Geron have pointed out that the urban ethnic enclaves have been the site for much Asian American activism for social justice throughout the history of the U.S.<sup>23</sup> These scholarships have illustrated that marginalized communities have been actively posing interventions to the normative patterns of spatial organizing that have put them in disadvantaged positions.

In summary, economic forces have driven both the formation and gentrification of urban ethnic enclaves in order to sustain the national imaginary of private home ownership. However, Lipsitz’s framework of a non-white spatial imaginary and the notion that the urban spaces have long been the platform for Asian American social activism could help dismantle the normative

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<sup>19</sup> George Lipsitz, "The Racialization of Space and the Spatialization of Race: Theorizing the Hidden Architecture of Landscape," *Landscape Journal* 26, no. 1 (2007).

<sup>20</sup> *Ibid.*, 13.

<sup>21</sup> *Ibid.*, 10.

<sup>22</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>23</sup> Michael Liu and Kim Geron, "Changing Neighborhood: Ethnic Enclaves and the Struggle for Social Justice," *Social Justice* 35, no. 2 (2008).



narratives of these ethnic enclaves as filthy and worthless. As the *A Radical History of Seattle's International District: A Walking Tour* states in its introduction, “there is hardly a block in the neighborhood that hasn’t been touched by resistance to racism and capitalism – the history is in the streets.”<sup>24</sup> Therefore, instead of only focusing on the oppressive spatial organizing processes, we should also view these urban ethnic enclaves as sites of continuous activism for various causes and as tools to reconfigure our relationships with land and spaces. In addition, Lipsitz advocates that “landscape architects, planners, and other land-use professionals” should be more cognizant of the U.S. racialization of spaces when making their planning decisions. And this Guidebook demonstrates that community members and organizations, rather than the city or the economic forces that have played vital roles in Seattle’s urban planning, have often been the ones who these informed choices in Seattle’s ID and its surrounding areas.<sup>25</sup>

### **Kingdome and The Early Fights against Gentrifying Forces**

The Guidebook first takes its participants to the intersection of 2<sup>nd</sup> Avenue South and East King Street, where we can still clearly see a gigantic stadium. This intersection is located within the neighborhood that is also commonly known as the Stadium District, one that has been highly contested by surrounding communities since its planning in the late 1960s. By highlighting the history of the construction of Kingdome stadium, the first massive stadium structure of Seattle, by the city, the Guidebook showcases that the Stadium District has continued to contribute to the uneven spatial organizing between itself and the International District.

The construction of the multi-purpose stadium of the Kingdome, as the Guidebook points out, was a result of the city’s plan to reorient its economy after the Boeing Company disinvested

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<sup>24</sup> *A Radical History of Seattle's International District: A Walking Tour* (Seattle, WA: Left Banks Books, 2015), 1.

<sup>25</sup> Lipsitz, "The Racialization," 20.

from Seattle in the late 1960s.<sup>26</sup> While the project was meant to revitalize the city's economy by having many businesses in this area and attracting tourists and consumers by this enormous athletic and entertainment infrastructure, activists from the International District viewed it differently. Because the ID is located so close to the then proposed Stadium District, many Asian American activists foresaw the displacement of ID's long time Asian residents after the construction of cheap hotels, restaurants, and other businesses oriented towards the tourists. This is a prominent example of how the International District in Seattle, a pan-Asian neighborhood, has been long subjected as a targeted space by the government for economic development regardless of the expenses of social welfare of its residents.

While it is evident that the ID has been experiencing gentrifying forces as early as the 1960s, it is noteworthy to study the ways that Asian American activists based in the ID have organized against these forces. The Guidebook refers us to the book titled *Humbow not Hotdogs*, written by Filipino activist and long-time ID resident Bob Santos, who was one of the leaders in the fight against the planning of a stadium district and subsequent projects that had the potential to gentrify the ID. The title of his book was also the slogan that he used during his organizing against the Stadium District in the 1970s. The message "Humbow not Hotdogs" demonstrates that gentrification also poses threats to the unique cultural practices of neighborhoods of color. More specifically, it asks us to imagine the consequences to have restaurants selling mainstream American fast food instead of ones selling traditional Chinese food. Not only will the business owners be driven out of the neighborhood, but also the residents who could have luckily stayed would experience the lack of culturally relevant food in their residential neighborhood, severely compromising the cultural integrity of the ID. This specific strategy conveys that Asian American

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<sup>26</sup> *A Radical*, 2.

activists have been long paying attention to and fighting against not only the displacement and relocation of residents during gentrification but also the threats to the history and culture of their neighborhoods.

As the Guidebook states, the construction of Kingdome during the 1960s-70s was not the only incident that has introduced gentrifying forces to the ID or other parts of Seattle. With the Kingdome beginning to literally fall apart during the 1990s due to its low budget, Seattle capitalists seized the opportunity to implode the old stadium in 2000 to carry out a similar but bigger project, which led to the presence of today's CenturyLink Field.<sup>27</sup> The Guidebook asks us to consider the cost of constructing the various amenities, including museums, retail corridors, convention centers, and the newer stadiums, to sustain a urban economy centered around tourism, suburbanites, and international investors, especially during the ongoing homelessness crisis in Seattle.

Furthermore, making its first location in the Stadium District before taking the participants into the ID, the Guidebook also sheds light on the presence of green spaces as a key issue within the debates around gentrification. Standing at this particular intersection, I inevitably noticed the presence of trees and colorful flowers on both sides of the streets in addition to the fancy restaurants and polished office and apartment buildings in this neighborhood. As I continued to follow the Guidebook, it is easily noticeable that such presence of plants became absent in the actual International District. Study has shown that only 10 percent of the International District has tree coverage, significantly lower than the city's average of 28 percent.<sup>28</sup> Many scholars and city planners have been focusing more on the health benefits of green spaces, for a variety of diseases and conditions, and been advocating for more green spaces in cities. In the case of Seattle's ID,

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<sup>27</sup> Ibid., 3.

<sup>28</sup> Agatha Pacheco, "Seattle's communities of color lack trees," *The Seattle Globalist*, April 26, 2018, <https://www.seattleglobalist.com/2018/04/26/resident-in-international-district-impacted-by-lack-of-trees/73657>.

the green space is important as the residents continue to face the exacerbating effects of air pollution, mainly in the forms of respiratory conditions, mostly caused by two nearby freeways, Interstate 5 and Interstate 90. Furthermore, it is necessary to acknowledge that the largest green space in the ID, the Danny Woo Community Garden, was a result of the activist movement against the Stadium District in the 1970s and has continued to be maintained and cared for by local community members. Thus, the contrast between the Stadium District and the ID in terms of green spaces, made discernable to the participants by the route of the Guidebook, reckons us to consider the environmental inequalities caused by gentrification.

Lastly, by narrating these stories of continuous fights against gentrification organized by Asian American activists from the ID since the 1960s, the Guidebook points to lack of official documentation of these struggles experienced by the residents in the ID. In contrast to the modern and polished look of the Stadium District, the International District still experiences the negative effects of gentrification while community members continue to fight back as part of the long-standing tradition of this neighborhood, commemorated and celebrated by community members.

### **The Original Chinatown and the Great Seattle Fire of 1889**

By highlighting the location and the history of the original Chinatown, this Guidebook points to the contrast between the commemoration of the Great Seattle Fire of 1889 through the placement of the Seattle Fire Department Headquarter and the absent memories of the original Chinatown, which was located next to where the Fire Department Headquarter is now.

The second stop of the tour is the intersection of 2<sup>nd</sup> Avenue South and South Main Street, located a few blocks west of the current International District. The Guidebook points out that the block north of the intersection was Seattle's original Chinatown, "home to Chinese migrant

workers who since the 1860s had participated in nearly all the region's industries.”<sup>29</sup> In addition, the Guidebook narrates one of the earliest radical (not in a good way) political moments, which took place on February 7, 1886, in the city. Fueled by the nationwide anti-Chinese sentiments, a group of white workers rounded up almost every single Chinese person in Seattle and forced them to board a steamer out of the city. The physical place of the original Chinatown might not have been totally destroyed until the great fire three years later, the virtual space of Seattle's original Chinatown definitely came to an end with the forced departure of Chinese people out of the city. Evidently, the anti-Chinese riot of 1886 in Seattle is an environmental injustice because it violated Chinese Americans' “political, economic, cultural and environmental self-determination,” a fundamental right outlined in *The Principles of Environmental Justice*.

The Great Seattle Fire of 1889 conveniently erased all the physical evidence of Chinese presence in this part of the city, and there are currently no visual elements at this site of the original Chinatown to signal the historical presence of a Chinese enclave and the violent erasure of the community and its members. Instead, the physical structure that stands out the most is the Seattle Fire Department Headquarter. First constructed in 1890 as a response to the severe damages that the city suffered during the 1889 fire, the building of the Seattle Fire Department Headquarter is quite noticeable with its giant red doors and the installation of the bronze statue of a firefighter on its exterior, which is lit by a red light during the night or a cloudy day. Such unique visual elements surely demonstrate the importance of this building, and subsequently the history of its foundation.

By pointing to the history of the original Chinatown, the Guidebook highlights the violence and oppression not recorded in any official capacity. In addition, having set the second location of the tour at the intersection of 2<sup>nd</sup> Avenue South and South Main Street, the Guidebook invites its

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<sup>29</sup> Ibid.

audience to observe the physical surroundings at this specific location and interrogate the presence of the Seattle Fire Department Headquarters as a commemoration of the 1989 fire in contrast to the absence of the original Chinatown.

### **Commemorated Gold Rushers vs. Unrecognized Migrant Laborers**

The Guidebook's marking of the Klondike Gold Rush National Historical Park contrasts with its detailed description of the Filipino Cannery Workers Union Headquarters, which used to be located at 213 South Main Street, allows us to examine the politically contested labor relations within the ID. Similarly, the commemoration of the Klondike Gold Rush workers through the National Park Services demonstrate the racialized and unequal recognition of laborers.

The Seattle unit of the Klondike Gold Rush National Historical Park, housed in the historic Cadillac Hotel, is dedicated to commemorating the Klondike Gold Rush in the late 1890s. Managed by the National Park Services, this park frames the Klondike Gold Rush as the key event that revitalized the port city of Seattle after the Great Fire of 1889 and its subsequent economic depression.<sup>30</sup> Seattle merchants took advantage of the gold rush by advertising the city as the "Gateway to the Gold Fields" in order to sell supplies to those who embarked on the journey to Klondike River, which meanders through both the U.S. state of Alaska and today's Yukon territory in Canada, to obtain wealth through gold mining.

It is bewildering that National Park Services, known for its major role in the mainstream U.S. environmental movement, failed to showcase the ecological consequences that came with the enthusiasm for gold mining. In the introduction to her monograph titled *The Nature of Gold: An Environmental History of the Klondike Gold Rush*, environmental historian Katheryn Morse points

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<sup>30</sup> National Park Services, "Rebuilt from Ashes, a Gateway to Adventure," *Klondike Gold Rush - Seattle Unit, National Historical Park Washington*, <https://www.nps.gov/klse/index.htm>.

out that all gold rushes in nineteenth-century North America were associated with industrialization.<sup>31</sup> Morse notes that the late-1890s Klondike Gold Rush “made Alaska and the Yukon part of the modern, industrial world,” which caused very serious consequences for both the ecosystems and the human beings. More specifically, gold mining both displaced indigenous people and drastically changed the human relationships to land in the area. However, the National Park Services not only overlooked these material impacts but also celebrated the capitalist progress, including the foundation of the Boeing Company and the Microsoft corporation, towards a modernized Seattle.<sup>32</sup>

Furthermore, the commemoration of the economic revitalization of Seattle enabled by white gold rushers also actively erases the labor provided by Asian American workers in the city. The Guidebook points us to the location of 213 South Main Street, where stands the deteriorating building that used to house the Filipino Cannery Workers Union Headquarters. Similar to the moving patterns of the gold rushers, the Filipinos, who came to the U.S. after the Philippines became an official U.S. colony after the Spanish-American War of 1898, were migrant workers traveling along the West Coast of the U.S. during work seasons and staying in Seattle during the off-seasons.<sup>33</sup> The Guidebook points out that the foundation of the Filipino Cannery Worker Union was to represent the Filipino migrant workers who pursued seasonal work opportunities in the canneries in Alaska annually, who came together along Seattle’s King Street during the off-season that became an informal “Manilatown.”<sup>34</sup> The Union became one of the most radical labor unions in the city under the leadership of Communist organizer, Chris Mansalves, Sr., who also mentored

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<sup>31</sup> Kathryn Taylor Morse, *The Nature of Gold: An Environmental History of the Klondike Gold Rush* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 2003), 8.

<sup>32</sup> National Park Services, “History & Culture,” *Klondike Gold Rush - Seattle Unit, National Historical Park Washington*, <https://www.nps.gov/klse/learn/historyculture/index.htm>.

<sup>33</sup> *A Radical*, 4.

<sup>34</sup> *Ibid.*, 4-5.

the next generation of the union's leadership, Silme Domingo and Gene Viernes. These radical activists organized against the discriminatory practices that Filipino and indigenous workers faced in the Alaska canneries. The canneries treated, paid and housed these workers differently based on their race. Based on the eighth principle of environmental justice, such oppressive practices at the canneries were environmental injustices because they deprived these workers from safe and healthy work environment. Therefore, the Filipino American labor activism based in Seattle is also an environmental movement.

The Guidebook's mere noting of the Klondike Gold Rush National Historical Park on its map also contrasts with its detailed description of the radical history of the Filipino Cannery Workers Union. This seems to be an intentional choice to highlight the contrast between the curated Klondike Gold Rush National Historical Park and the decaying building that used to be the Headquarters of the Filipino Cannery Workers Union. Such visual and literary contrast, represented in the actual urban landscapes and in the Guidebook, ask us to recognize the uneven and racialized ways that labor has been celebrated or exploited in the history of Seattle.

### **Preserving Public Memories of Nihonmachi and Japanese American Internment**

The Guidebook discusses in great extent about the history of Nihonmachi, or Japantown, in Seattle's International District. In particular, the Guidebook highlights the negative impacts of the Japanese American internment during World War II and the efforts by Japanese American communities in Seattle that led to U.S. government's financial redress and apology to Japanese Americans.<sup>35</sup>

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<sup>35</sup> Ibid., 7.



The Guidebook provides a detailed discussion on the role of Japanese Americans during the development of Seattle. While Japanese American communities contributed much to the economic development of Seattle through promoting international trades prior to World War II, the racist real estate practices in Seattle prevented them from settling anywhere else in the city other than the area around Jackson Street.<sup>36</sup> Thus, a new ethnic enclave, known as Nihonmachi, or Japantown, formed, centering 6<sup>th</sup> Avenue and Main Street, and served as the site for a vibrant Japanese American community. However, President Franklin Roosevelt's Executive Order 9066 following the bombing of Pearl Harbor displaced all people of Japanese descent from the West Coast of the U.S.

It is certain that the Japanese American interment was an environmental injustice issue because the War Relocation Agency intentionally chose locations with harsh natural environments to detain and torture Japanese Americans. In other words, Japanese Americans were denied access to a healthy living environment during their internment. At the same time, the incarcerated Japanese Americans were often asked to perform high-risk labors in unsafe work environments as well. Environmental historian Connie Y. Chiang also provides a detailed examination of this history of Japanese American interment through an environmental lens. She states that such an examination allows us to understand the unique relationships that Japanese Americans formed with the arid western natural landscapes, different from the ways that white farmers, ranchers, and tourists interacted with these lands.<sup>37</sup> Chiang also illustrates that "the battle over Japanese exclusion and inclusion during World War II" went beyond the boundaries of courts, jails and battlefield and extended into the arid western landscapes.<sup>38</sup> It is important to note that Japanese

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<sup>36</sup> Ibid.

<sup>37</sup> Connie Y. Chiang, "Toward an Environmental History of the World War II Japanese American Incarceration," *Environmental History* 15, no. 2 (April 2010): 257.

<sup>38</sup> Ibid., 258.

Americans also found agency through the natural environments “to both adjust to and protest their confinement.<sup>39</sup> Therefore, seeing the Japanese American internment as an environmental justice issue allows us to recognize the distinct ways that they interacted with the environment and to expand our notion of environmentalism.

However, similar to all the other radical histories discussed so far, the preservation of the public memories for the Japanese American history has fallen on the shoulders of community activists rather than the government. The Guidebook lists two major literary work dedicated to these histories: the 1957 novel *No-No Boy*, which documents the physical and psychological struggles that Japanese Americans endured for their return to Seattle, written by John Okada, who was born in Seattle and displaced from the city during the internment period; and the 2001 book *Born in*



Figure 2 Portraits of Japanese Americans Who Served in the U.S. Military during World War II, on Display in the Shop Window of the Panama Hotel Coffee Shop

*Seattle: The Campaign for Japanese American Redress*, which documents Seattle-based activists’ instrumental efforts in the national Japanese American redress movement, written by Robert Sadamu Shimabukuro. Furthermore, the Guidebook points the participants to the historic Panama Hotel, located at 605 1/2 South Main Street, which has many artifacts from and photos of the old Nihonmachi in the coffee shop (see figure 2), operated in its original lobby. While I was taking the tour, I also had the fortune to talk to the staff working at the coffee shop, who kindly talked about the maps, photos, and artifacts displayed within the shop.

<sup>39</sup> Ibid.

In summary, this Guidebook offers a useful description of the Japanese American histories in the ID and provides its participants with additional sources, both literary and physical, to further understand the ways that the ID community has preserved such histories. Lastly, I also want to highlight two public art projects, completed after the publication of this book, that commemorate the Japanese American histories in the neighborhood. Completed in 2016 and owned and managed by the InterIm Community Development Association, Hirabayashi Place is a transit-oriented and mixed-use housing development.<sup>40</sup> The building is named after Japanese American sociologist Gordon, known for his courageous stance in his fight against the Japanese American internment. By depicting the internment history and showcasing Hirabayashi's quotations through plaques outside the building, Hirabayashi Place actively engages its residents and visitors to embrace the legacy of Gordon Hirabayashi and everyone else who fought against the discriminatory treatments towards Japanese Americans during World War II. At the same time, designed by artist Kenji Hamai Stoll, a newly completed mural at the entrance to the Danny Woo Community Garden is composed of "geometric Chinese, Japanese and Filipino textile designs" and "drawings from old photos including businesses like the Higo store, images from Executive Order 9066 and the Japanese American Redress movement."<sup>41</sup> Both projects demonstrate the desire of the ID community to continue honoring the legacy of past activists as a way to envision a more just future for the neighborhood.

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<sup>40</sup> InterIm Community Development Association, "Hirabayashi Place," *What We Do: Real Estate Development*, <http://interimicda.org/project/hirabayashiplace/>.

<sup>41</sup> Chetanya Robinson, "New Danny Woo garden mural honors Nihonmachi and activist history in Chinatown-ID," *International Examiner*, April 16, 2019.

## Cross-Ethnic Spatial Solidarity

As mentioned earlier, Lipsitz discusses a non-white spatial imaginary that “revolves around solidarities within, between, and across spaces,” countering the white spatial imaginary focused on the privatization of lands.<sup>42</sup> While it is clear that much of activist efforts in the ID has been centered around the public goods, the Guidebook demonstrates that the uneven spatial organizing driven by economic forces have not only negatively impacted the residents of the ID but also those of the Central District, a historically black neighborhood next to the ID. Moreover, the Guidebook also highlights the cross-ethnic solidarity and coalition work that have took place between the two neighborhoods for decades.

The Guidebook takes the participants to the site of the Dearborn Street regrade at the far eastern end of the ID bordering the Central District. In the early 1990s, engineers of Seattle leveled hills across the city as a way to alter the natural geography to allow commerce and development to prosper.<sup>43</sup> As part of the larger city-wide initiative, the Dearborn Street regrade aimed to connect downtown with Rainier Valley, further south of the city, by cutting through Beacon Hill. As the Guidebook points out, this project destroyed a neighborhood of poor working-class immigrants. This project of implementing drastic change to the natural topography of a city for economic purposes, which evidently resulted in the displacement of disenfranchised communities, is surely an environmental injustice. The Guidebook cites the story of a Black migrant family, who witnessed the sinking and eventual destruction of their own house due to the degrade, from Matthew Klinge’s *Emerald City: An Environmental History of Seattle*.<sup>44</sup> At the same time, the Guidebook tells the story of the protests against a proposed freeway interchange, which would

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<sup>42</sup> Lipsitz, “The Racialization,” 10.

<sup>43</sup> *A Radical*, 12.

<sup>44</sup> Ibid., 12-13.; Matthew W. Klinge, *Emerald City: An Environmental History of Seattle* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2007), 114.

have erased thousands of homes in the Central District.<sup>45</sup> Even though this interchange never came into existence, by taking the participants to the vantage point where they could see the Central District, neighboring the ID, and the I-5 and I-90 freeways, the Guidebook suggests that both neighborhoods of color have continued to suffer from the air and noise pollutions that the two freeways create.

Having established the shared environmental and social struggles between the two neighborhoods, the Guidebook highlights one specific example of cross-ethnic organizing that achieved tremendous success. The Guidebook points to the current site of Goodwill at Dearborn Street and Rainer Avenue, where a new development of a huge shopping mall and 550 housing units were proposed in 2005.<sup>46</sup> Yet, members from various ethnic communities in the two neighborhoods have come together and formed the Dearborn Street Coalition for Livable Neighborhoods.<sup>47</sup> In 2008, the Coalition deliberated on a [Community Benefits Agreement (CBA)] with developers of the Dearborn Street Project.<sup>48</sup> The benefits of the CBA included “affordable housing with single family units, decent wages for project workers and apprentices, the banning of pawnshops and payday lenders from the area, and \$800,000 for various community projects.”<sup>49</sup> While the Dearborn Street Project was eventually cancelled in 2009 due to the economic recession, this cross-ethnic organizing effort is still a pioneering model for creating accountability of developments for community members.

While the Guidebook does not explicitly point it out, the cross-ethnic organizing has taken place between the ID and other communities for decades. If we took a deeper look at the biography

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<sup>45</sup> Ibid., 14.

<sup>46</sup> Ibid., 15.

<sup>47</sup> Ibid.

<sup>48</sup> Emma T. Lucas-Darby, "Community Benefits Agreements: A Case Study in Addressing Environmental and Economic Injustices," in "African Americans and Movements for Reparations: Past, Present, and Future," special issue, *The Journal of African American History* 97, nos. 1-2 (Winter/Spring 2012): 103.

<sup>49</sup> Ibid.

of Bob Santos, whom the Guidebook mentions as one of the prominent leaders of the fight against the construction of the Kingdome Stadium, we would find out that he had organizing along with Native American activist Bernie Whitebear, Mexican American activist Roberto Maetas, and African American activist Gary Gossett since the 1960s.<sup>50</sup>

## Conclusion

In this chapter, I argued that *A Radical History of Seattle's International District: A Walking Tour* demonstrates that while stories of Asian American activism have often been hindered from official documentation. In contrast, community members in the International District have actively trying to preserve these memories through books, storytelling, and many visual cultures, such as buildings, murals, etc. The Guidebook highlights such a contrast in the preservation of the radical histories of the ID through providing detailed descriptions of such histories and taking its participants to the sites with clear physical evidence, such as infrastructures, preserved artifacts, etc. I have also illustrated that many of the activist movements featured in this Guidebook can be read as activism for environmental justice. Furthermore, this Guidebook highlights that gentrifying forces and fights against these urban transformations have never been one-time incidents isolated in the ID itself. Rather, these unjust spatial organizing practices have negatively impacted other working-class communities and communities of color in Seattle, and these communities have come together to fight against these struggles for decades.

Recognizing the vibrant indigenous culture and activism in the Pacific Northwest in general, I also see the similarities between this method of inquiring hidden radical history through detailed attention to physical places to the framework of *storied land*, rooted in indigenous and

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<sup>50</sup> Bob Santos and Gary Iwamoto, *The Gang of Four: Four Leaders, Four Communities, One Friendship* (Seattle, WA: Chin Music Press, 2015).

decolonial studies. Mishuana Goeman states that “deconstructing the discourse of property and reformulating the political vitality of a *storied land* means reaching back across generations, critically examining our use of the word land in the present, and reaching forward to create a healthier relationship for future generations”<sup>51</sup> This walking tour suggests that the urban spaces for Asian Americans are also *storied* yet in different ways. The rich descriptions provided by the Guidebook enables us to learn about the radical Asian American histories that are not physically visible yet embedded within the material structures in the ID. However, in order to truly understand the histories of these spaces, we have to first recognize that the land, on which the ID stands, was tended by the Duwamish people long before anyone else settled upon it.

As mentioned in the Introduction of this thesis, I turn to *storied land* as a framework, with the recognition that the Asian American urban landscapes have been part of the U.S. settler colonial project. I propose that a decolonial/indigenous framework could help us to re-envision the Asian American relationship with land as part of the Asian American Environmental Justice project. My call for the Asian American environmental justice movement to turn to a decolonial framework is not centered around a romanticized indigenous past but rather a recognition that the mainstream U.S. environmental movement, without repatriation to Indigenous people, will always be complicit in the ongoing dispossession of Indigenous land. Furthermore, the framework of *Storied Land* allows us to acknowledge the various relationships that different communities have established with lands and thus to educate the general public about the environmental movement with the consideration that everyone experiences the land and the environment differently. La Paperson provides an excellent example of how *storied land* could serve as a critical pedagogy to

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<sup>51</sup> Mishuana Goeman, "From Place to Territories and Back Again: Centering Storied Land in the discussion of Indigenous Nation-building," *International Journal of Critical Indigenous Studies* 1, no. 1 (2008), 24.

land-based environmental education. In his article “A ghetto land pedagogy: an antidote for settler environmentalism,” La Paperson illustrates that a transit-oriented urban ecology lesson will meet its obstacles if the instructors do not consider the distinct relationship between poor communities and public transit.<sup>52</sup> I continue to make this move of advocating for a decolonial framework at the end of my next chapter, during which I will examine a walking tour organized for telling the radical South Asian histories in the city of Berkeley, CA.

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<sup>52</sup> La Paperson, "A ghetto land pedagogy: an antidote for settler environmentalism," *Environmental Education Research* 20, no. 1 (2014): 120.



## CHAPTER TWO: WALK TRANSCONTINENTAL AND TRANSTEMPORAL SOUTH ASIAN HISTORY IN BERKELEY, CA

Curated by South Asian activists and community historians, Barnali Ghosh and Anirvan Chatterjee, the *Berkeley South Asian Radical History Walking Tour* is a 2-mile and 3-hour walking tour that aims to highlight “100 years of Desi history on the streets of Berkeley.”<sup>53</sup> Through forms of street theater, storytelling, and visual aids, the current version of the tour brings together eight different yet linked South Asian activist stories from 1908 to 2016. As a California landscape architect, Ghosh works at the intersection of cities, climate and activism. Chatterjee, a technologist, also sees his work rooted in both racial and climate justice. Other than this walking tour, they have also worked together on the “Year of No Flying” project from 2009-2010, during which they “tried to get around the world aviation-free, while interviewing about sixty climate, environmental, and transportation activists in a dozen countries.”<sup>54</sup>

Ghosh and Chatterjee spent years collecting stories through oral histories, readings, and archival research before they gave the first walking tour on August 5, 2012 for “the participants of Bay Area Solidarity Summer—emerging Desi activists ages 15–21.” Their website states that “the Berkeley South Asian Radical History Walking Tour is a way to share these histories with a wider audience—to inform, ground, and inspire new activism, in the tradition of movement historians like Zinn and Takaki.”<sup>55</sup> Having been conducted 185 times for over 2800 participants as of now, the tour has received much national attention: it was awarded *Best of East Bay* in 2014 and an *APIA Preservation Award* in 2016 and has been featured on *NPR*, *NBC*, and *National*

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<sup>53</sup> Barnali Ghosh and Anirvan Chatterjee, “100 Years of Desi History on the Streets of Berkeley, CA,” Berkeley South Asian Radical History Walking Tour, <http://www.berkeleysouthasian.org/>.

<sup>54</sup> Barnali Ghosh and Anirvan Chatterjee, “Our Year of No Flying,” Year of No Flying, <http://www.yearofnoflying.com/>.

<sup>55</sup> Barnali Ghosh and Anirvan Chatterjee, “Walking Tour Curators,” Berkeley South Asian Radical History Walking Tour, <http://www.berkeleysouthasian.org/>.

*Geographic*.<sup>56</sup> The tour is also remarkable because of Ghosh and Chatterjee's to continuous knowledge sharing both through a pamphlet with a list of resources that they handed out to all the participants at the end of the tour, and the various digital spaces that they have created, including "Secret Desi History," "Beyond Gandhi and King: the Secret of South Asian and African American Solidarity," and "Berkeley South Asian History Archive."

In this chapter, I will examine the current version of the *Berkeley South Asian Radical History Walking Tour*, in which I participated on the morning of October 13, 2019.<sup>57</sup> Drawing from my personal experience of the Tour, local news articles, and the additional resources that Ghosh and Chatterjee provide, I argue that the *Berkeley South Asian Radical History Walking Tour* enables its participants to take part in the transcontinental and transtemporal activist movements organized by South Asian communities on the streets of Berkeley through specific storytelling choices. Similar to Chapter 1, I also offer a reading of the movements highlights in this Tour through an environmental lens, illustrating that South Asian communities have been part of the environmental movement throughout their history in the U.S. Furthermore, I argue the cross-ethnic coalition building efforts within these South Asian radical histories highlighted in the Tour direct us towards future activism that recognize that our liberation is always bounded with that of others. Lastly, I will again discuss the importance to recognize the peculiar position that Asian Americans occupy in the settler colonial nation of the U.S. and to turn to a decolonial/indigenous framework for Asian American environmental activism. In the context of this chapter, it is especially critical to acknowledge that the transcontinental and transtemporal storytelling choices must take settler colonialism and the dispossession of indigenous land into consideration.

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<sup>56</sup> Ghosh and Chatterjee, "100 Years," Berkeley South Asian Radical History Walking Tour.

<sup>57</sup> I will use the word *Tour* instead of its full title for concision through this chapter

The questions that I explore here include: how does this Tour complicate the perception of the South Asian identities and histories by uncovering stories that account for the intersectional experiences of South Asians in the Bay Area? How can street theater and storytelling link past activism movements and enable us to imagine a more just future? How does the transpacific movements of South Asian bodies connect to belonging, labor, and land?

In the rest of the chapter, I will first establish how most of the activist stories highlighted in this Tour can be viewed as environmental activism. I then focus on how this Tour enables transcontinental and transtemporal analyses of these radical histories for its participants. After discussing the various cross-ethnic organizing highlighted by the Tour, I will elaborate on the importance of embracing a decolonial framework for this Tour.

### **An Environmental Reading of Berkeley South Asian Radical History**

In the first pillar of the Critical Environmental Justice (CEJ) framework, David Pellow advocates for the importance to consider “the role of agency - an act or intervention with the capacity to effect change” in social movements.<sup>58</sup> More specifically, identifying the non-human agencies in activist movements allow us to expand the notion of environmental movement.

The *urban built environment* is one of the non-human elements most discussed by EJ scholars. Julie Sze argues that the original EJ movement itself was able to create an “expansive view of what constitutes the “environment” [that] repudiates the elitist, racist and classist wilderness/preservationist dichotomy, which sees the environment as being equal to ‘nature.’”<sup>59</sup> She adds that the EJ movement asks for holistic worldview that “see the environment as a site

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<sup>58</sup> Pellow, *What Is Critical*, 45.

<sup>59</sup> Julie Sze (2004), “Asian American Activism for Environmental Justice,” *Peace Review* 16:2, 149.

where people (in particular people of color) ‘live, work and play.’”<sup>60</sup> As Pellow states, the urban built environment, with its various infrastructures, is often seen as a “socio-nature” and provides many possibilities for social organizing. In many stories mentioned on this Tour, the built environment of Berkeley is a critical site for both oppression and social change. In the story of sex trafficking of young women and girls by the Reddy family, the wealth accumulation through the material form of real estate in Berkeley allowed the Reddys to have the status and the space to commit his human trafficking crimes. The urban built environment also allowed South Asian activists like the members of the Ghadar Party to come together to organize against social and political struggles experienced by South Asians. Furthermore, the built environment of Berkeley also permitted the very act of walking in the context of this tour, which is full of potential for future social changes. As the subtitle suggests, “100-year Desi history” is ingrained into the streets of Berkeley.

*Water and Land* are also non-human agencies that I consider in these stories. In her 2007 article titled “Water and Land: Asian Americans and the U.S. West,” Dorothy Fujita-Rony articulates the ways that Asian Americans are tied to land and water, including water as a transient space for early Asian American migration, the settlements of Chinatown on coastal cities in the U.S. West, and the relationships that Asian Americans developed with land and water through their roles as factory and farmworkers.<sup>61</sup> A focus on the relationships that Asian Americans have established with water and land could provide us with nuances of how the Asian American environmental movement can be distinct from the mainstream environmental movement. For example, the anticolonial activism against the British Empire highlighted in this tour can be seen

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<sup>60</sup> Ibid.

<sup>61</sup> Dorothy Fujita-Rony, “Water and Land: Asian Americans and the U.S. West,” *Pacific Historical Review* 76, no. 4 (November 2007).

as environmental movements as South Asian were also fighting for the access to water and land, which were highly regulated and degraded during the British colonial rule of the Indian subcontinent.

With these non-human environmental agencies in mind, I will discuss how most activist stories told on this Tour have been part of the environmental movement. As discussed above, the British colonial occupation of the Indian subcontinent can be read as an environmental injustice because the British colonial regime had altered the relationships that the locals had with their lands and other natural resources through more strict control over these resources. Sociologist Naresh Chandra Sourabh and economic historian Timo Myllyntaus offer a more detailed analysis of the British colonial occupation as an environmental justice issue in a virtual exhibition through the Rachel Carson Centre.<sup>62</sup> When examining the famines between 1850 and 1899, Sourabh and Myllyntaus state that the British colonial regime converted many agricultural fields to export crops rather than to produce food crops for the local population while also banning alternatives to food supplies, such as foraging in the forest and the systems of subsistence farming between neighboring communities. At the same time, the British colonial government also developed large networks of railroads to transport grains for export rather than local consumption, exacerbating the effects of the famine experienced by native Indians. Therefore, the British colonial occupation of the Indian subcontinent is an environmental justice issue because the local population was denied access to sufficient food supplies and the British colonial government altered the location relationship with their lands through imposing drastic changes onto the natural geographies. As a result, the anti-British colonial activism highlight in the Tour is inherently environmental activism.

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<sup>62</sup> Naresh Chandra Sourabh and Timo Myllyntaus, "Famines in Late Nineteenth-Century India: Politics, Culture, and Environmental Justice," *Rachel Carson Centre, Virtual Exhibitions 2015, No. 2*, <http://www.environmentandsociety.org/exhibitions/famines-india>.

Another activist movement highlight in this Tour is the protests against the declared State of Emergency in India between 1975 and 1977 organized by Berkeley international students from India and local South Asian activists. Through additional research, I argue that the 1975-77 State of Emergency in India posed many environmental challenges. Historian Patrick Clibbens points out that there were many state-sponsored urban clearance programmes, facilitated by authoritarian republican ideas, that took place during the 1975-77 Indian Emergency.<sup>63</sup> Such nation-wide projects can be read as environmental injustice issues because they have denied access to Indian urban spaces for unwanted people with low class status. At the same time, the Indian national government enforced strict family planning policies, which sterilized millions of people, probably also for the purpose of poverty eradication during the Emergency.<sup>64</sup> Early environmentalist thoughts view population control as an effective solution to global environmental issues, yet population control policies have often been employed by nation-states in violent manners to further their economic developments. Therefore, these violent acts of population control enforced by the Indian nation-state can also be read as environmental justice issues.

Lastly, the activist movements against hate crimes, evoked by 9/11 and the election of Donald Trump in 2016, can be seen as environmental activist movements. The hate crimes following the two national events deprived the fundamental rights of their victims to political and cultural self-determination. At the same time, they also denied the access to view the public urban environment of Berkeley as for the targeted individuals. Thus, these hate crimes violated the 5<sup>th</sup> Principle of Environmental Justice, making the organizing against them environmental justice

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<sup>63</sup>Patrick Clibbens, "'The destiny of this city is to be the spiritual workshop of the nation': clearing cities and making citizens during the Indian Emergency, 1975–1977," *Contemporary South Asia* 22, no. 1 (2014): 51.

<sup>64</sup>Rebecca Jane Williams, "Storming the Citadels of Poverty: Family Planning under the Emergency in India, 1975–1977," *The Journal of Asian Studies* 73, no. 2 (May 2014): 471.

activism. An environmental reading of these activist stories also allows us to see the ways that the notion of environmentalism could expand to become more inclusive.

### **Walking across Geographical and Temporal Scales**

Through street theater and storytelling, Ghosh and Chatterjee curated the tour to allow its participants to witness the oppression and resistance of South Asians through time and space and enables them to actively imagine themselves as embedded within the past, presence, and futures of social changes. *Berkeley South Asian Radical History Walking Tour*'s intentional disruption of linear temporality and place-specific struggles aligns with the second pillar of the CEJ framework, which invites scholars to apply “multi-scalar methodological and theoretical approaches to studying EJ issues in order to better comprehend the complex spatial and temporal causes, consequences, and possible resolutions of EJ struggles.”

Such a transcontinental and transtemporal reading of South Asian activism history in Berkeley through walking illustrates that the struggles and agency of South Asian Americans are situated across different geographical and temporal scales, and also showcases the possibility for political organizing across time and space. By mapping South Asian activist stories over 100 years onto the streets of Berkeley, the two-mile and three-hour walking tour itself becomes a transtemporal and transcontinental vehicle that takes its participants out of the current temporal scale. In this section, while analyzing the transcontinental and transtemporal aspects of the stories, I also focus on the various theatrical and storytelling choices that Ghosh and Chatterjee made that enabled an immersive experience for the tour participants.

### *Transcontinental Struggles and Activism*

When using the term *transcontinental*, I first intend to acknowledge the immigrant identity embedded within the history of South Asian Americans. At the same time, I want to highlight that the violence towards South Asians have been taking place at various locations (specifically in both South Asia and the U.S. in these stories) and shed light on the possibilities for activism to take place across geographical scales. I will specifically discuss the first Berkeley South Asian student protest, the story of Kartar Singh Sarabha, and the 1975 student protests against the state of emergency.

The story that illustrates the transcontinental nature of South Asian struggles and activism is the one of the sixteen students from India protesting against J. Lovell Murray, a Christian evangelist who gave a talk titled “Awakening the Orient” in Berkeley organized by the local Y.M.C.A in 1908.<sup>65</sup> Murray delivered a talk with the same title at Stanford University a few days earlier, and an Indian student who participated found Murray’s “comments on the religious conditions in Hindustan” offensive and tipped off the Indian students at Berkeley. Having their request to Murray to censor his part of the speech that “[reflected] upon the moralities of Hindu priests,” Girindra Mukerji, who led the Indian students to participate and sit in the front row of the talk, “denounced British rule in India,” made it clear that the Hindu religion was not at fault for India’s colonization, and stated that the Indians had wanted political freedom. Ghosh and Chatterjee suggested that this might have been the first recorded South Asian activism efforts in the city of Berkeley and perhaps the first ever South Asian campus protest in the U.S.

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<sup>65</sup> “Hindu Students Flay Missionary.” *San Francisco Call*. January 18, 1908.  
<http://www.saada.org/item/20131129-3487>.



Murray's talk signals that the oppression of South Asians had been taking place across continents at the time. The word "Orient" in the title of his talk already illustrates the epistemological oppression that has been perpetuated by Western scholars and rulers on South Asia and beyond. Furthermore, the word "awakening" also imposes an epistemological hierarchy between the West and South Asia/the "Orient." Considering the role of Christianity in colonial histories, it is also clear that there was a need for Christian organizations to devalue eastern religions in order to justify their missions. The U.S. location of the talk also adds complications and nuances to the analysis of the colonial oppression of South Asians. While the British colonized part of the U.S. before their colonial rule of the Indian subcontinent, the U.S. has never been truly freed from colonization as it continues to manifest colonial ideologies domestically through the marginalization of people of color and indigenous people. Furthermore, Murray's talk, which essentially aimed to justify the British rule of India to a U.S. audience is an example of the U.S. colonial entanglements in the international front. In addition, such a talk would have perpetuated harmful stereotypes for South Asians in Berkeley and contributed to the growing anti-Indian sentiments in the U.S.

While Murray's talk demonstrates that the South Asian struggles during the British colonial rule in India took place on the Indian subcontinent and in the U.S., the protest led by Girindra Mukerji illustrates that the activism for South Asian liberation also has the capacity to transverse through geographical spaces. On the one hand, we see that South Asian activism was organized across the Bay Area between higher education institution in this particular incident. On the other hand, the Berkeley South Asian Students' expressing their wish for India's political freedom from the British empire on the U.S. soil hints at how diasporas provide people with the opportunities to create a more daring imagination for a better future. Narrated across the street from the Stiles Hall,

the building where Murray gave his talk, the storytelling by Ghosh and Chatterjee enabled the participants to see the transcontinentality of the first student protest here.

Ghosh and Chatterjee told the stories of this first student protest at Berkeley followed by the story of Kartar Singh Sarabha, a young man who died fighting for Indian independence as part of the Ghadar Party in 1915, further showing the transcontinental potential for the diasporic organizing for issues both in the diaspora and the homeland. Kartar Singh Sarabha, born in 1896 in Punjab, India, came to the U.S. through the port of San Francisco in 1912. Ghosh explained that various sources suggested that Kartar Singh intended to study at Berkeley but there was no official school record to prove his enrollment. Instead, he joined many other Indians to become farm workers on the west coast of the U.S.

Challenged by the anti-Indian sentiment and the exploitative labor practices in the U.S., Kartar Singh soon saw the parallel between the British colonial oppression upon Indian bodies and the American way of enslaving Indian laborers.<sup>66</sup> It was then he started organizing meetings with Indian students and laborers in the Bay Area to discuss the causes of continued enslavement in India and to envision an India without British colonial rule. Upon hearing the foundation of the Ghadar party, an organization that was mobilizing revolutionary work for an independent India among Indians in North America, in 1913, he immediately joined the organization and played a central role in the publication of the Ghadar Party's newspaper. Similarly, he was one of the most eager ones when it came to learning military operational skills in the U.S. as preparation to take the movement back to Punjab. Kartar Singh indeed was one of the first ones boarding the ship back to India to start a real revolution, yet he was also ultimately sentenced to death by the British

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<sup>66</sup> Baba Sohan Singh Bhakna, "Shaheed-e-Azam Kartar Singh Sarabha." 2003. <https://www.saada.org/item/20120806-1011>.

imperial government. Nonetheless, his efforts as well as the rest of the Ghadar Party established incredible foundation for the later Indian independence movements.

Kartar Singh Sarabha's story truly indicates the potential for the transcontinental migrants to identify the forces and systems in place that have discriminated against them both in their homeland and in the diaspora. At the same time, Kartar Singh's roles not only in the formation of an organization that has gained momentum from Indian expatriates across geographical scales, namely the west coast of North America, but also in the efforts when members of the Ghadar Party took the revolutionary work back to India, reveal the immense potential that South Asian Americans hold to organize against their oppression across places. In a similar vein, the telling of the 1975 Berkeley student protests against the state of emergency in India declared by Indira Gandhi's government is another example of how Ghosh and Chatterjee have demonstrated the transcontinental momentum that South Asian activism has been able to garner. For me, it is also the kind of transpatial imagination for a different future that I found the most powerful in these stories.

The stories of the first South Asian students protest and of Kartar Singh Sarabha and the Ghadar Party point to the transcontinental struggles that South Asians experience both in their homeland and in the U.S. (specifically in Berkeley in the context of this walking tour). The scandal of the Reddy family sex/human trafficking also illustrates that oppression for South Asians are not fixated in one single place, rather they are connected transcontinentally through global systems of imperialism, colonialism and capitalism. The juxtaposition of these stories allows the tour participants to recognize the multiple forces at work, including the British colonial power, the U.S. exploitative system of immigrant laborers, the Indian caste system, and authoritarianism in India during the Emergency of 1975-77. Yet, it is generative to view the migrant identities of South

Asian Americans both as a cause for their oppressions within these various transcontinental systems of power and as a source of agency that allowed South Asian Americans to lead activist movements that challenge these forces.

### *Transtemporal Storytelling*

My use of the term *transtemporal* highlights the multiple ways the Berkeley South Asian Radical History Walking Tour allows an immersive experience that transcends through temporal scales and reconfigures the notion of time. First, by narrating the stories through geographical location then a timeline, the walking tour disrupts the linearity of time. Second, By drawing connections between struggles and activism that took place at separate times, the tour allows the participants to recognize that history of South Asian activism is not always a progression but rather one that with many similar drawbacks and turns. Third, by bringing history alive or asking the tour participants to step outside of the current timeframe, the tour evokes a transtemporal experience for the tour participants. Lastly, by telling 100 years of history within the time span of three hours, the tour signals its ability to transcend through time. In this section, I will first compare the struggles behind the story of “Everyone Is Welcome Here” and “Cultural Unity at Berkeley High School.” Then I will dive deeper into the theatrical and storytelling choices behind the presentation of the 1975 Protesting Emergency story and of Kartar Singh Sarabha.

“Everyone Is Welcome Here” refers to a poster of a smiling woman in hijab (see figure 3) designed by Oakland artist Micah Bazant in collaboration with Sabiha Basrai of the Alliance of South Asians Taking Action (ASATA) in 2016.<sup>67</sup> The production and distribution of this poster was in response to the increase of hate crimes in the U.S. after the 2016 election of Donald Trump. “The Southern Poverty Law Center documented 867 hate incidents across the US in the first 10 days after the election,” and the city of Berkeley was no exception as it saw “at least 14 reported incidents of hate in the first 15 days since the election.”<sup>68</sup> Berkeley South Asian activists have canvassed the entire city to identify allies among local businesses and organizations and ask them to show solidarity through hanging this poster.



Figure 3: "Everyone Is Welcome Here" Poster

Similarly, after the 9/11 incident in 2011, Silk, Arab, or Muslim identifying students at Berkeley High School experienced waves of hate and xenophobia from their peers at school. Some parents even advised their students to stop wearing their traditional cultural or religious attire to avoid hate incidents.<sup>69</sup> Students at Berkeley High came up with a creative solution in the midst of

<sup>67</sup> Anisha Chemmachel, Anirvan Chatterjee, and Anasuya Sengupta, "Is Everyone Welcome Here? A Poster Campaign Against Hate," *The Aerogram*, December 18, 2016, <http://theaerogram.com/is-everyone-welcome-here-a-poster-campaign-against-hate/>.

<sup>68</sup> Ibid.

<sup>69</sup> Sasha Khokha, "Speaking Out in Schools," *AsianWeek*, October 2001, [http://web.archive.org/web/20070613101251/www.asianweek.com/2001\\_10\\_05/news\\_schools.html](http://web.archive.org/web/20070613101251/www.asianweek.com/2001_10_05/news_schools.html).

xenophobic sentiments by giving out green arm bands to designate “safe” people who others can turn to in classrooms and other spaces and who would voluntarily escort others across the campus or on the way home.

The choice to not tell the two stories in chronological order made the many similarities shared by these two stories stand out even more. When Ghosh and Chatterjee were telling the story at Berkeley High, I felt folded into a multidimensional point of history because I saw the two stories overlapping through both the oppression that South Asians felt at Berkeley and the solidarity supported them during those hard times. By disrupting the linearity of time through the non-chronological telling of these two stories, the tour challenges the known perception of Berkeley as a liberal progressive city since the 1970s and point to that inability for Berkeley South Asian residents to escape the pervasive national xenophobic sentiments. While both stories pointed to the hidden history of the struggles at Berkeley triggered by national events, they also shed light on the agency that South Asians had been able to obtain through solidarity building via the form of arts and other non-human objects (i.e. the green arm bands). The disruption of time embedded in the telling of these stories illustrates that South Asian Americans continue to experience struggles because the racialized political climate in the U.S. does not progress without any obstacles but with many setbacks and turns.

The way that Ghosh and Chatterjee told the 1975-77 Protesting the Emergency story is one of the most exemplary of the tour’s ability to interpolate its participants out of the contemporary time scale and into a different moment in history. Ghosh and Chatterjee made the choice to perform some street theatre in order to reenact this history that took place on the campus of UC Berkeley. Coincidentally, I was one of the two participants that Chatterjee asked to participate in the performance. Chatterjee told me that it was mainly because I was telling them about my

contemplation of my positionality to the Asian American history as an international student from China.



*Figure 4: Reenactment of the 1975-77 Protests against the State of Emergency in India, across from the Martin Luther King Jr. Building on UC Berkeley Campus*

The three of us took off from the main group as Ghosh pointed to a mural on the street to divert everyone else's attention in order to prepare for our street performance. On the way to a raised platform across from the Martin Luther King Jr. Building, which houses the Associated Students of the University of California (ASUC) Student Union, Chatterjee explained the significance and complications with these Indian international students at Berkeley protesting against the state of emergency in India between 1975 and 1977. The state of

emergency in India during those three years, also known as the "Emergency," was an active effort by the Indian government to maintain an authoritarian regime. Even though these Indian students were far away from their homelands, they still took it as their responsibility to voice their opinions against the government's action by protesting at the Indian Embassy. However, because most of these students were on an Indian national scholarship for their study in the U.S., all of them wore face masks made of brown paper bags to conceal their identities and to avoid repercussions for their involvements in these protests. The liberal environment at Berkeley, became known around

the same time, also benefited these student protesters as the institution refused to reveal their names to the Indian national government when asked.

Led by Chatterjee, the three of us, with the same brown paper bag masks on (see figure 4), yelled “down with emergency” as we threw our fists down and “free India now” as we raised them back up as the rest of the tour group approached us. While feeling shy about performing publicly on the street for the first time, I was able to channel emotions and energy that the students held over four decades when they felt called to confront the unjust actions imposed by their own government. For the rest of the tour group, as they revealed during our debrief later, most of them first of all did not recognize that the three of us were part of the tour because of our brown paper bag masks, offering an opportunity for them to be interpolated into the historical temporality of the protests. The fact that some tour participants did not think that it was a performance for a historical event but rather of the ongoing protests against the strict military occupation of the Kashmir region in India speaks to the power of such street theatre in folding and unfolding the normative temporality and illustrate that continuity of South Asian struggles and activism across continents. While I also drew the link between the 1975-77 protests to the ongoing organizing against the totalitarian control over the Kashmir region, I was also thinking of the ongoing organizing in North America, Australia and New Zealand, regarding the state of Hong Kong protests, a political unrest that is more closely tied to my own country. These thoughts that connect the reenactment of the historical protest in 1975-77 to contemporary transcontinental organizing against political unrests suggest the fulfillment of the mission of the tour, which is to inspire new activism through recognizing the historical movements.

Furthermore, an amazing moment happened when Ghosh and Chatterjee passed around a flyer titled “Protest Fascism in India” from 1976 to demonstrate the scope of these protests was



not limited to just Berkeley but the entire Bay Area, a participant from our tour group remembered that they were actually at that protest when they were as a kid. Ghosh and Chatterjee stated that these moments had occurred couple times on their tour when a story on the tour revoked a participant's memory about their personal involvements in these historical events. These moments illustrate how the tour can become a transtemporal vehicle that transcends certain participants into their own personal history, asking them to recognize that their presence is also entangled in these past activism events.

The presentation of Kartar Singh Sarabha's story is another example of the tour's ability to pull its participants out of the current temporality into historical moments. As Ghosh told us on the tour, Chatterjee has been interested in theatre and has taken community theatre classes. Thus, he gave us a beautiful performance of Kartar Singh's poem, written on the day of his execution:<sup>70</sup>

On the judgment day  
Before the gods  
These will be my words, my statement:  
I am a servant of Indians  
India belongs to me  
Yes, Indian I am  
One hundred percent Indian  
Indian is my blood and my caste  
This is my only religion  
My only tribe, my only clan  
I am a particle of the ravaged India's ruins  
This is the only name I have  
The only hallmark, the only address

Oh, Mother India this was not be my fate  
My good fortune  
That with every movement of mine  
I could have worshipped your feet  
O Mother India  
If my head is offered  
My life is sacrificed  
In your service  
Then, I would understand  
Even in my death  
I will attain  
A life of eternity.

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<sup>70</sup> F. C. Isemonger and J. Slattery, *An Account of the Ghadar Conspiracy (1913-1915)* (Berkeley: Folklore Institute, 1998).

Through his dramatic reading of the poem, Chatterjee was able to channel the emotions and determination that Kartar Singh held before his death and project them onto the audience. We all took a moment of silence voluntarily to pay respect to a pioneer in South Asian activism who unfortunately died at the tender age of nineteen. The ability of Chatterjee's performance to transcend emotions through temporal scales is also evident in Ghosh's tears, which, according to herself, occurs every time after hearing Kartar Singh's poem. At the same time, the capacity of this poem to preserve feelings that remain legible after over a century also points to the transtemporal non-human agency embedded in arts for social change. Lastly, the poem itself plays with the notions of temporality as Kartar Singh states that his determination for India's independence is not restrained by the temporal scale of his life.

An analysis of the temporal dimensions of these stories allows us to recognize that bodies, objects, knowledge, and spaces are intrinsically linked together. A transtemporal consideration of these stories through the intentional choices of the conduction of the tour generates highlights the importance of recognizing the past in order to address the present and to imagine the future. In this specific context, the tour aims to inspire us to dig into the history unwritten in our mainstream history textbooks with the hope to find agency through these radical moments. When disrupting the linearity of normative ways of knowing time, the tour also asks us to acknowledge that all the present and future South Asian activism will be rooted in the foundations of past activists.

### **Multi-Ethnic Coalition Building**

In the last pillar of CEJ, Pellow brings in a concept named *indispensability*, which counters “an assimilationist perspective which seeks to (often involuntarily and violently) incorporate

others" into one's own vision of a society"<sup>71</sup> Pellow states that indispensability sees "all communities (more-than-human and human) as interconnected interdependent, but also sovereign and requiring the solidarity of others." In this section, I use indispensability as a framework to examine some of the stories included in the Berkeley South Asian Radical History Walking Tour. Indispensability offers an opportunity for us to engage with the migrant identities that many South Asian Americans hold and the transcontinental activism in which they are engaged. The framework of indispensability is also useful when analyzing the South Asian American stereotype in the Bay area because even till this day, many South Asians are asked to assimilate into the capitalist tech-industry-centric culture there, yet their labor is often the most exploited in those industries.

The stories of the first student protest in Berkeley, of Kartar Singh Sarabha, and of the 1975-77 protests against the State of Emergency all suggest that these South Asian activists recognize their interconnectedness with everyone else back in Asia. While the immigrant narrative sometimes positions those who migrated as separated from their homelands, these stories are evidence that these South Asian Americans recognized that their oppression and liberation were tied to the fate of their home countries. In particular, the story of Kartar Singh Sarabha reveals that he made the direct connection between the exploitation of South Asian laborers in the U.S. and the enslavement of Indian people under the British colonial rule. While geographically apart, the destinies of these South Asian populations were intertwined not only because of their shared ethnicity but also because they were all living within exploitative systems that were also connected. Viewing these stories of transcontinental activism through indispensability asks the tour

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<sup>71</sup> Pellow, *What Is Critical*, 27.

participants to acknowledge that the oppression imposed upon people of color still takes place on a global scale today and that their liberations are also bounded together.

Besides highlighting the interconnected oppression and liberation of South Asians on the global scale, a reading of the tour through indispensability also helps the tour participants to recognize the cross-racial/ethnic organizing that South Asian Americans have been part of. When telling the history of the Ghadar Party, Ghosh and Chatterjee pointed out the joint efforts between the leaders of the Ghadar and the Irish immigrants, who also faced xenophobic sentiments in the U.S. while organizing against the British rule in Ireland. While deliberately pinpointed the cross-racial solidarity building and organizing, Ghosh and Chatterjee also suggested that such practices of solidarity have been long-standing in the South Asian activism history, some included in Chatterjee's online blog titled "Beyond Gandhi and King: The Secret of South Asian and African American Solidarity." Such cross-racial organizing also recognizes that the exploitation of Asian American laborers was rooted in "the American tradition of African chattel slaves and indigenous laborers," and the fight of justice for Asian American laborers should extend beyond the racial lines.<sup>72</sup> Furthermore, these cross-racial organizing efforts demonstrate the immense amount of power in indispensability as groups have created more voice and shared strategies.

The stories of "Everyone Is Welcome Here" and of cultural unity at Berkeley High School are also examples of successful cross-cultural organizing in Berkeley South Asian activism history. The creation of the poster "Everyone Is Welcome Here" is already a cross-racial efforts between Micah Bazant, a white anti-Zionist Jew who "identifies as trans, nonbinary, and *timtum* (one of six traditional Jewish gender categories)," and Sabiha Basrai, a South Asian activist fighting against islamophobia. Furthermore, while the poster features a hijab-wearing Muslim woman, the caption

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<sup>72</sup> Johanna Ogden, "Ghadar, Historical Silences, and Notions of Belonging: Early 1900s Punjabis of the Columbia River," *Oregon Historical Quarterly* 113, no. 2 (June 2012): 170.

recognizes that hate crimes go beyond islamophobia and xenophobia and harm people of all marginalized identities.

While xenophobic sentiments intensified after 9/11 at Berkeley High School, student leaders from the school who tried to address the unsafe campus environment for many students organized with two student groups. One of them is Cultural Unity, an organization of English-as-a-second-language students based at Berkeley High, and the other is Youth Together, a multiracial youth social-justice group in Oakland, Berkeley and Richmond.<sup>73</sup> Similar to the story of “Everyone Is Welcome Here,” the campaign started off as one that aimed to help Middle-Eastern-looking students at Berkeley feel safer, and it ended up bringing together students from many marginalized backgrounds as a coalition to speak against discrimination and oppression in general. Considering the segregated history of the U.S. educational system, *indispensability* is a critical framework to reimagine an educational space that does require underrepresented student to assimilate rather one where everyone is critically engaged to understand each other’s cultures.

In my opinion, the term *indispensability* can help us broaden the notion of the Asian American environmental activist movement. In other words, the Asian American environmental activist movement should not just advocate for environmental justice solely for Asian American communities but for all disenfranchised communities.

## Conclusion

In this chapter, by focusing on the non-human environmental agencies within these activist stories, I articulated how the activist movements told on the Tour can be seen as environmental activist movements as well. I then analyzed the transcontinental and transtemporal experiences

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<sup>73</sup> Angela Hill, "Berkeley Students Try to 'Unteach' Hate: High Schoolers Want to Dispel Arab Stereotypes," *InsideBayArea*, <http://web.archive.org/web/20150620025540/http://www.insidebayarea.com/>.

that the *Berkeley South Asian Radical History Walking* could evoke for its participants. In addition, the Tour also illustrates the importance of multi-ethnic coalition building in South Asian activist movements.

While this chapter focuses on the transcontinental and transtemporal aspects of the South Asian histories based in Berkeley, it is important to note that these two concepts also require a serious consideration in relations to indigenous history and settler colonialism. As discussed in the introduction, the social production of specific temporalities, namely the progressive time, have functioned to facilitate the process of settler colonialism and capitalist modernization, resulting in the continuous dispossession of land of Indigenous people. Thus, while the transtemporal aspects of the Tour asks the participants to envision more just South Asian futurities rooted in the legacies of past activists, we also need to actively imagine a futurity centered around indigenous repatriation and redress. The term *transcontinental* also requires careful interrogation of which continents have South Asian Americans passed through and occupied, considering that the U.S. has been a continuous settler colonial project. Similarly, the move to consider the role of water in the Asian American relationship with the environment and to view Asian Americans as transpacific subjects needs to acknowledge that the Pacific Ocean is a colonially occupied space, where Indigenous Pacific Islanders face ongoing erasure of their cultures and dispossession of their lands.

One of the main goals of this Tour is also to dismantle the “model minority myth” imposed upon Asian Americans.<sup>74</sup> In her book *Alien Capital: Asian Racialization and the Logic of Settler Colonial Capitalism*, Iyko Day discusses the “model minority myth” as a neoliberal method of Asian American racialization, which invites Asian American to assimilate based upon their

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<sup>74</sup> Zahir Janmohamed, "An Interview with Anirvan Chatterjee and Barnali Ghosh: Founders of the Berkeley South Asian Radical History Walking Tour," *Asian American Unabridged*, November 14, 2017.

economic efficiency.<sup>75</sup> By embracing the “model minority myth,” Asian Americans inevitably participate in an economic system that continues to exploit the culture and lands of Indigenous people. Therefore, the Tour’s goal to disrupt the “model minority myth” is a great start for establishing a decolonial Asian American environmental movement. However, the Tour needs to be much more explicitly in explaining the positionality of Asian American communities to settler colonialism and has to work with native tribes in the area in order to truly take on a decolonial approach towards the environmental movement.

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<sup>75</sup>Iyko Day, *Alien Capital: Asian Racialization and the Logic of Settler Colonial Capitalism* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2016), 7.

## CONCLUSION: A CRITICAL LAND PEDAGOGY THROUGH RADICAL HISTORY WALKING TOURS

In summary, both tours provide many useful pedagogical tools to help their participants to unpack the hidden and layered radical histories embedded within urban spaces. The guidebook *A Radical History of Seattle's International District: A Walking Tour* does not set a time limit for its participants, allowing them to carefully read through the detailed descriptions that it provides to specific locations in the International District. Furthermore, the Guidebook points its tour participants to specific local businesses and organizations that have played critical roles in preserving the radical history of activism in the neighborhood, providing them with opportunities to interact with local residents to gain a lived perspective about the neighborhood's history. On the other hand, through street theatre of re-enacting past activist protests and dramatic reading of past activists' writings, the two curators of the *Berkeley South Asian Radical History Walking Tour* grant the tour participants an embodied transcontinental and transtemporal understanding of these radical histories. This Tour also allows the interaction among tour participants, enabling a more dynamic understanding of these histories by listening to others' personal takes on these stories. Both tours employ photographs as visual aids to strengthen the participants' comprehension of specific stories. Furthermore, both tours provide a list of further readings, allowing their participants to look deeper into these activist histories. In the case of the Berkeley Tour, the two curators have also created many digital spaces for more knowledge production and sharing of these radical histories.

On the other hand, I have shown that both tours have the capacity to invite their participants to pay closer attention to the environmental stakes in the stories told. An environmental reading of these stories, told through both tours, also illustrates that many Asian American social and political



movements have been addressing environmental issues. Thus, more explicit interpretation of these environmental stakes through the walking tours would also help their participants expand their understanding of the notion of environmentalism.

Furthermore, these walking tours have highlighted that Asian American communities share many struggles and oppressions caused by uneven spatial organizing in the U.S., driven by capitalist desires, with other communities of color and working-class communities. As Asian American activist have gained great successes by working with other communities, these walking tours also help us understand the importance of cross-ethnic solidarity and organizing. To take one step further, I argue for an Asian American environmental movement that advocates for environmental justice for all disenfranchised communities.

Lastly, as I articulated throughout this thesis, it is important and useful for Asian American communities to turn to decolonial/indigenous frameworks to envision a more just future. This call for decolonial consideration should not be read as the same as cross-ethnic solidarity. While Asian Americans and Indigenous people have both been oppressed in the U.S., it is also evident that all Asian American struggles and resistance are linked to the erasure of Indigenous culture and the dispossession of lands of Indigenous people. Referring to the Asian settlers in Hawai'i, Candace Fujikane states that "all Asians, then, including those who do not have political power, are identified in this book as settlers who participate in U.S. settler colonialism."<sup>76</sup> Fujikane points out that the large-scale entry of Asians into Hawai'i was enabled by U.S. settler colonialism.<sup>77</sup> My call for a decolonial framework as part of the Asian American environmental movement is a recognition that Indigenous people have tended the lands long before any settlers came to the

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<sup>76</sup> Candace Fujikane, "Asian Settler Colonialism in the U.S. Colony of Hawai'i," introduction to *Asian Settler Colonialism: From Local Governance to the Habits of Everyday Life in Hawai'i*, by Candace Fujikane and Jonathan Y. Okamura (Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press, 2008), 6.

<sup>77</sup> Ibid., 7.

continental United States. Moreover, as articulated at the end of Chapter 1, the decolonial framework of *storied land* asks us to recognize that settler colonialism and capitalism have altered the human relationship with land and have deemed land only as property. A turn to the decolonial framework of *storied land* provides us with a more critical pedagogical tool to understand the varied relationships that each person has established with their land, as a way to be more considerate and inclusive when we teach the next generation about environmental and land conservation.

In conclusion, this thesis project points to a critical land pedagogy through radical history walking tours. In other words, I argue that walking tours can engage more people in unpacking the histories embedded in lands and in recognizing that settler colonialism, capitalism, and racialization have all contributed to the unjust spatial organizing and uneven land distribution within the United States. Such a critical land pedagogy through radical history walking tours can not only expand our notions of environmentalism but also allow us to reconfigure our relationships with land.

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